

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr.: Restricted
27 February 2025
English

Original: English and French

**Standing Committee
Ninety-second meeting**

Emergency response and supply

Summary

This paper presents developments in the areas of emergency preparedness and response since the last update provided to the eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2024 (EC/75/SC/CRP.4). The paper emphasizes the steadfast commitment of UNHCR to being a predictable and reliable partner in responding to emergencies, while also addressing the challenges arising from growing insecurity.

I. Introduction

1. In 2024, the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide surpassed 122 million. As new crises emerged amidst ongoing conflicts and escalating humanitarian emergencies, displaced people around the world experienced repeated displacements, with many compelled to return home under adverse conditions. UNHCR responded to these unprecedented humanitarian needs by scaling up its preparedness, emergency response and supply capacity.
2. UNHCR is committed to serve as an effective first responder to situations of forced displacement and to this end continuously monitors emergency risks through horizon scanning. UNHCR offices worldwide are also equipped to conduct risk analyses and maintain a proactive preparedness stance. Emergency declarations empower operations with the authority and accountability to utilize pre-determined expedited procedures, enabling a swift humanitarian response.
3. An effective emergency response necessitates an efficient and capacitated supply chain, encompassing the implementation of cash-based initiatives, as well as transportation and distribution of in-kind assistance. To this end, UNHCR advocates for an “alternative to camp” approach. This strategy supports national governments in strengthening their capacities and ensures that emergency responses are aligned with national systems, thereby avoiding the creation of parallel services. These measures are important to ensure a sustainable and cost-effective response, and to assure, to the extent possible, that forcibly displaced persons are included in national mechanisms.

II. Strengthening emergency preparedness and response capacity

A. Preparedness actions

4. In 2024, UNHCR promoted proactive emergency preparedness using a risk-based approach and by undertaking early action. Forty-six country operations identified a high risk of a new or escalated emergency during the course of the year. These operations and their respective regional bureaux were supported with comprehensive risk analyses, contingency planning in refugee and internal displacement situations, and identification of critical preparedness gaps. Targeted assistance was provided to operations with a Level 1 emergency declaration, particularly those involving more than one regional bureau, to ensure that the preparedness and initial response efforts were coordinated. More than 250 UNHCR personnel were introduced to the provisions of the Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response and other relevant guidance through virtual information sessions. Products, such as regional risk snapshots, thematic guidance and visualizations, were made available through an internal emergency preparedness and response portal.
5. UNHCR continued to undertake global monitoring of situations at high risk of an emergency. It contributed to the early warning, early action and readiness initiative of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which strengthens the preparedness and response capacities of humanitarian agencies. Focus on emergency risks caused by natural hazards was increased. In this regard, UNHCR participated in specialized fora, such as the Working Group on Preparedness, Early Action and Readiness of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Partnership with the World Meteorological Organization was also strengthened. In addition, UNHCR joined the Early Warning for All initiative, led by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, as a global implementing partner for the pillar on disaster risk knowledge.
6. In 2024, UNHCR in collaboration with the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology, successfully launched a predictive artificial intelligence project to develop an advanced early warning and effective response system to help humanitarian actors prepare and plan for emergencies. This multi-year project aims to develop an integrated and data-driven system to detect escalation of emergency risks that could lead to forced displacement. It uses early warning indicators and delivers displacement forecast ahead of emergencies.

B. Capacity development

7. During the reporting period, over 600 humanitarian workers and government officials participated in emergency preparedness and response capacity development activities organized by UNHCR. These included 212 individuals selected for the emergency deployment rosters, following the organization of four workshops on emergency management and two specialized events. In addition, a context-specific emergency workshop was conducted for 35 responders addressing the South Sudan crisis. The UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (eCentre) in Bangkok, Thailand also organized training sessions for over 300 government and humanitarian personnel from 20 countries in the Asia and Pacific region. The newly launched eCentre for Africa in May 2024 provided workshops and peer coaching sessions to 64 local humanitarian actors from 23 sub-Saharan African countries. The knowledge gained by the participants was subsequently shared with more than 630 emergency responders in their respective countries.

8. The UNHCR Emergency Handbook, a digital reference tool, provided updated practical guidance on emergency preparedness and response to UNHCR and its partner staff in the six official United Nations languages. An offline application of the Handbook, which was launched in 2024, enables users to access the contents of this reference tool without internet connection.

III. Delivery of emergency response

A. Overview of emergencies and policy implementation

9. In 2024, UNHCR responded to 43 emergency declarations in 25 countries, including 26 new emergencies declared during the year and 17 declarations from 2023. Sixty-five per cent of new declarations were related to crises in Africa, 23 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa and 12 per cent in the Americas.

10. Among the new declarations, seven were Level 3 emergencies linked to the escalating conflict in the Sudan, affecting Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, as well as the large-scale displacement within Lebanon and to the Syrian Arab Republic. Level 2 emergency declarations were issued for Libya and Uganda to scale up the response to address the needs of increased arrivals from the Sudan. UNHCR also fulfilled its commitments to enhance coordination and operational response following three Inter-Agency Standing Committee humanitarian system-wide scale-up activations issued by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to enhance the humanitarian response in Lebanon, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

11. Almost 35 per cent of the new emergency declarations were issued in response to the impact of natural hazards such as flooding in Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and South Sudan, and drought in Zambia. Populations already displaced by conflict in hosting areas were further affected by disasters induced by extreme weather events. They experienced additional challenges due to worsening outbreak of diseases, loss of livelihoods and critical infrastructure.

12. In 2024, UNHCR updated the Refugee Coordination Model guidance to ensure a more effective and inclusive response to refugee situations, aligning with the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees. A new Refugee Emergency Response Scale-Up Protocol was added to the model. The protocol aims to enhance the predictability and inclusiveness of responses to refugee emergencies by clarifying roles and principles for collective action. Activation of the protocol entails a call to mobilize additional financial, human and material resources from all relevant stakeholders and supporting host governments in leading and coordinating the response in an inclusive manner.

B. Emergency deployments and partnerships

13. The UNHCR emergency deployment mechanisms were effectively aligned to support the preparedness and response to multiple emergencies in 2024. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring the availability of personnel with the required professional and language competencies, and maintaining a gender and geographical balance.

14. To complement the regional first-responder mechanisms and missions, UNHCR facilitated over 250 emergency deployments from centrally managed rosters, including 137 through its emergency standby partners. Nearly 30 per cent of these deployments were in support of the response to the Sudan situation, followed by the situations in the Central Sahel, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. As part of the commitment of UNHCR to strengthen emergency leadership, a dedicated six-member emergency surge team spent nearly 500 days on emergency missions in 2024. UNHCR actively participated in the Emergency Directors Group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and provided support through joint field missions to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar and the Sudan.

16. UNHCR participated in the inter-agency Standby Partnership Network, which includes 16 United Nations organizations and 56 partners, sharing its experiences and expertise. In 2024, the value of in-kind contributions from standby partners amounted to \$9.4 million. In addition to deployment of experts, UNHCR received generous support from Emergency.lu, Ericsson Response, CISCO Crisis Response, and Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), who provided technical and communication support.

IV. Supply management

17. UNHCR utilized its seven global emergency stockpiles while responding to new and escalating emergencies, particularly in situations where procurement of local stocks was challenging and the implementation of cash-based interventions was difficult. A total of 1,632 containers of vital supplies, valued at \$45.8 million, were dispatched to provide relief to an estimated 5.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless people. Approximately 270 metric tons of supplies were shipped by air, over 4,500 tons by sea and more than 4,800 tons by road. UNHCR organized four pro bono airlifts, transporting life-saving items from the emergency warehouse in Dubai to Chad and the Sudan. Additionally, the Office facilitated seven free-of-charge air shipments to Lebanon and one to Chile. Global stockpiles were maintained to meet the urgent needs of up to 1 million people, with additional supplies in the pipeline for another 500,000 people.

18. To meet the growing humanitarian needs, UNHCR invested in a simple, swift and sustainable supply chain, as set out in its supply strategy, allowing it to deliver material assistance and procure services more efficiently. Following the redesign of the supply procedures, significant progress was made with process simplifications. For example, the Office removed non-essential steps from its contract approval process to improve the efficiency of procurement while safeguarding effective oversight. UNHCR also optimized its inventory levels by better aligning stocks with operational demands, reducing excess stocks globally.

19. UNHCR regularly reviewed its network of global stockpiles and their target levels for cost efficiency, speed, forecasted needs and reduced environmental footprint. The Office also explored new location options to augment these facilities, thereby strengthening regional response capabilities and enabling faster aid delivery while achieving cost savings. To expand logistics solutions and enhance emergency preparedness and response capacity, UNHCR increased its collaboration with humanitarian partners through initiatives such as the STOCKHOLM platform, a mapping and analysis tool designed to foster collaboration on stock prepositioning. UNHCR also sourced greener items without UNHCR visibility for its global stockpiles, which could be transferred at cost to partners in need of immediate response.

20. UNHCR made important strides in improving the sustainability of its supply chain. With the support of humanitarian and private sector partners, the Office has modified the product specifications of eight core relief items, addressing issues related to production, recyclability and packaging. UNHCR is also gradually replacing current stocks with more sustainable equivalents. Following extensive market assessments in the Americas region, the Eastern Horn of Africa and Southern Africa regions, UNHCR has launched tenders to expand its supplier base in order to source goods and services closer to emerging and protracted

emergencies. This is expected to reduce cost, delivery times and carbon emissions, while increasing competition and lowering the geographic risk in sourcing. Furthermore, by prioritizing waste management and installing renewable energy systems in its global warehouses, UNHCR is set to surpass its initial target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions stemming from the production, purchase, delivery, and use of core relief items by 20 per cent by the end of 2025.

V. Conclusions

21. UNHCR continues to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the complex and growing humanitarian needs by enhancing its emergency preparedness and response capacities. The Office's proactive measures undertaken in 2024, including comprehensive risk analyses, contingency planning, and targeted trainings, ensured that operations were better equipped to manage new and escalating emergencies.

22. The efforts of UNHCR to streamline its supply chain and improve the sustainability of its operations have positioned the organization to deliver timely assistance. The focus on reducing the environmental impact and increasing collaboration with humanitarian partners has further strengthened the organization's response capabilities.

23. Conventional humanitarian responses cannot keep pace with the growing scale, complexity, and protracted nature of forced displacement, which is compounded by increased instability, poverty, food insecurity, and environmental changes. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR will continue to support whole-of-society, government-led approaches, focusing on the shift from short-term crisis management to long-term resilience-building, to ensure that emergency interventions strengthen existing systems rather than create temporary or parallel structures.
